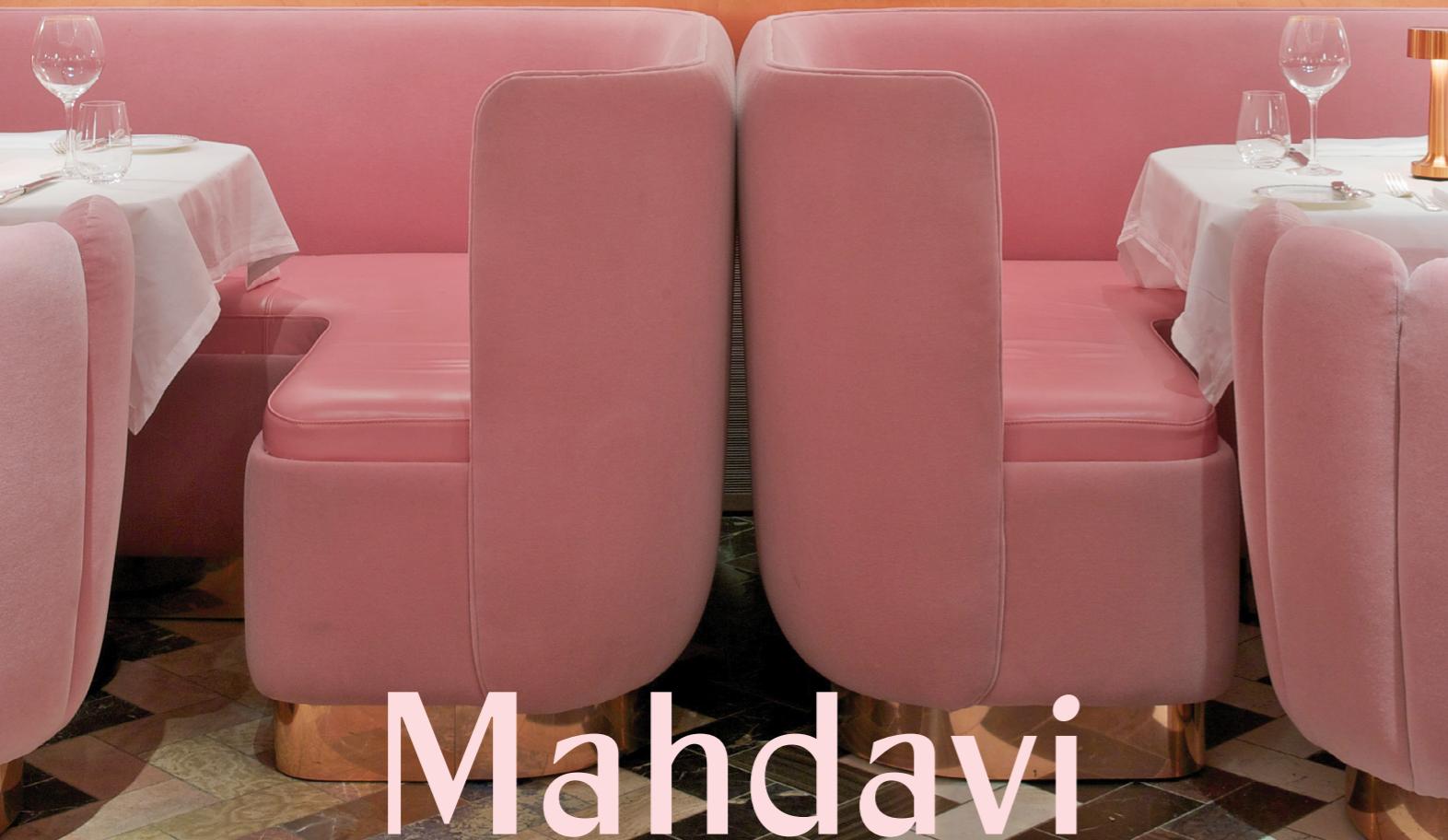
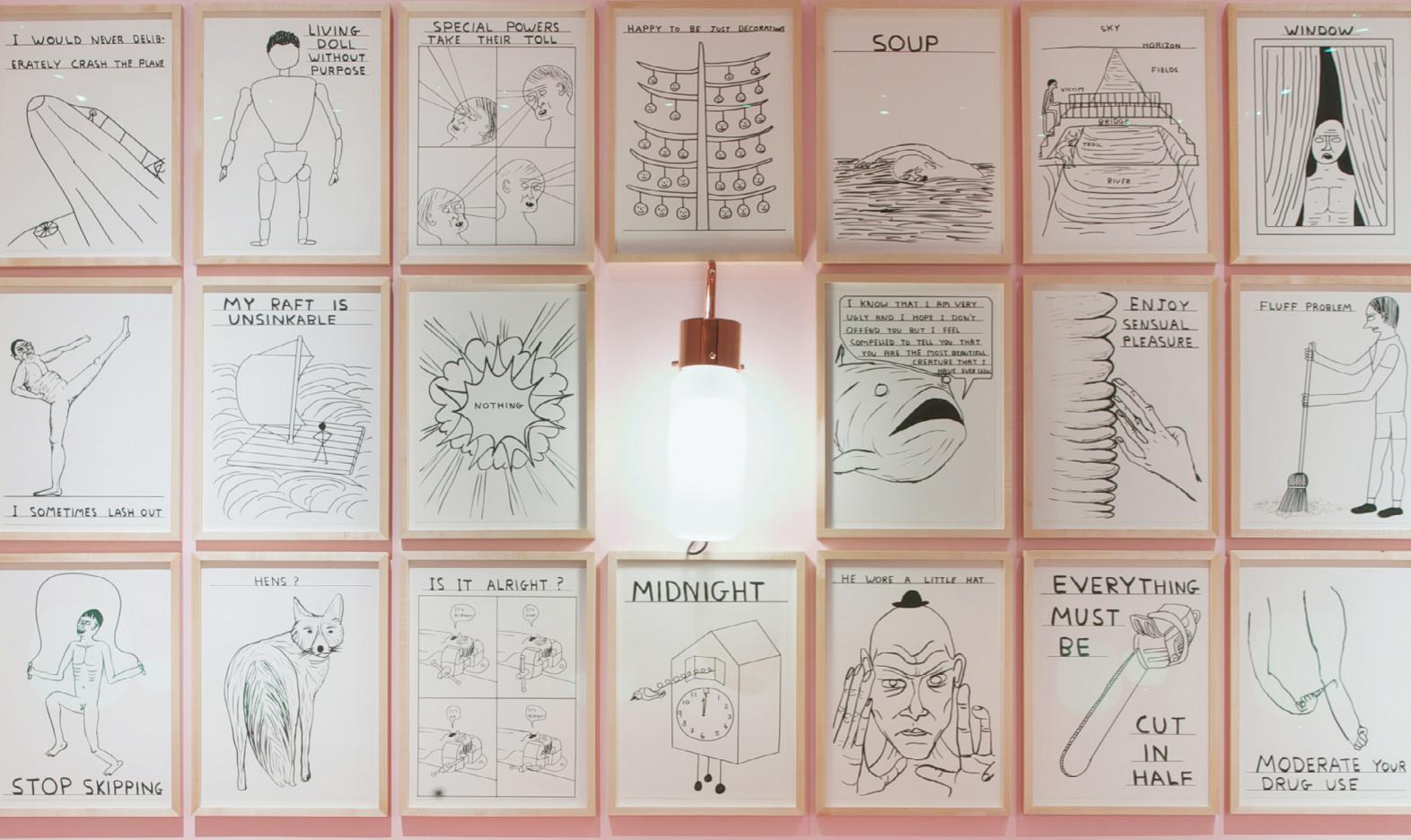


# India



# Mahdavi

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## The Woman Who Cried Pink

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Words by Kotryna Abaravičiūtė

# Mahdavi



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If you ask me what pink smells like to me, my answer would be that note of peonies in Acqua di Parma Peonia Nobile. If you ask me how it tastes like, I probably would say like Macaron Gourmand Rhubarbe - Thé Marie Antoinette by Ladurée. What movie is pink? I guess it's Grand Budapest Hotel by Wes Anderson, or maybe Virgin Suicides by Sofia Coppola. What spice is pink? Easy - Himalayan salt. And if pink was a place? Well, without a doubt - it would be *The Gallery at sketch London*.

Even if we all have our own space that pink brings to mind, no one can argue that if there was a contest for the pinkest pink, this space would be the winner. It's no surprise that I discovered this pink-land on Instagram; it's been dubbed one of the most Instagrammable places in the world. And I understand why.

When I first discovered *sketch London*, I simply couldn't stop staring at it. I suddenly felt like Alice entering Wonderland. The only difference was that I didn't want to escape at all, quite the opposite - I wanted to dive deep and find out everything that hides behind *sketch's* Gallery. So as I started my research on the kingdom of soft velvet and magic snippets of gold scented English tea, I discovered polyglot, polychrome India Mahdavi.

*The Gallery at sketch London* is just one project among a multitude of colourful spaces and objects that architect and interior designer India has created. When browsing through her portfolio, it's impossible not to notice the distinct way she uses colour in all of her work. When I ask her about it, she admits she is in love with colours and finds all of them unique, authentic, and exciting to work with. India thinks colours are similar to people - they have conversations with each other, but they can also get into huge fights. The more colours the merrier.

'I dream in colour', India says. 'My first memories are in technicolor and they have become the expression of my work'. I tend to think that perhaps it's India's background and all the places she's lived in that developed this strong emotional connection to colour. Her roots are from Iran, having both Persian and Egyptian heritage, and she grew up while constantly travelling with her family. The designer says that her childhood days spent in the U.S. are some of the best memories she has. Movies, music, cartoons, and the colours of the 60s; living on cotton-candy, swimming in glitter, and drinking cherry Cola.

But when her family moved to Germany, Mahdavi's world suddenly turned black and white. She faced a language she didn't know, a culture she wasn't familiar with - so her life became a silent film. After a year spent there, India's family moved again - this time to Nice, and later to Vence, where her creative learning began. She started experiencing a different type of fine arts, which later became India's language. She tells me she was even

dreaming about becoming a filmmaker. 'It allows you to tell the story that you want to tell, and see the world as you want to see it. In my career as an interior architect and designer, I have managed to find a middle ground between film and architecture. I perceive my projects as permanent movie sets'. This perhaps explains why her designs are often compared with fragments of Pedro Almodóvar's movies.

When I ask her to tell me a bit about the last places she's lived in, I notice how her mind connects her memories to colours. 'In Paris, the light is pink', she says. 'In London, the grass is green, and the sky is grey. In New-York, the light is orange or mandarine au lait'. According to her, she has always been carried by life's circumstances, allowing herself to go wherever her intuition led her to. Many years, colours, and cities later, she now lives in Paris, but her works are brightening spaces all over the world.

What I'm most curious about is how her creative process starts, and how she experiences her eureka - that euphoric moment when a brilliant idea suddenly hits you, or, as I find out that India names it - 'A l'attaque'. My mind paints a picture of India in her studio, with a paint palette in her hand, Miles Davis in the background, and cherry blossoms blooming outside of the window. But India says it all starts with listening - to her client, space, and location. It allows her to create and write a specific narrative. And then later, a question will arise. "Every project is about trying to answer a question. My favourite part is defining that question. It is often the beginning of a narrative. I try to keep a sense of humour in my daily routine which lets my ideas loose. Travelling and bouncing ideas back and forth with my team is another source of creativity."

And what about eureka? That magic moment happens to India when seeing a prototype that turned just as she imagined it, or when seeing people inhabit a space beautifully by breathing life into it. To India, euphoria is also experienced when solving problems through the power of work and reflection that lead to fruition. 'Two eurekas a day keep the doctor away. I try to comply', she tells me. When asked about her proudest eureka moments throughout her many projects, Mahdavi flies back to the beginning of her career and the time when she lived in the United States, remembering the Icebreakers.

**"Two eurekas a day  
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'The two very first projects I did with Jonathan Morris were the Townhouse in Miami and APT in New-York. For the townhouse, it was the first time that I defined the identity of a hotel through three colors: baby blue, red, and beige, together with a New England flower pattern. It was the very first affordable boutique hotel and carried a few fun elements: a red terrace with 10 meters long waterbeds, oversized pillows as long as the bed. For APT, I created a nightclub in the Meatpacking district based around a fictional character named Bernard. The club was designed as Bernard's apartment, with a kitchen, bedroom, living room, family pictures; and was reminiscent of an Upper East Side flat. Its enigmatic location and inconspicuous access made it one of New York's trendiest clubs.'

And what about The Gallery at sketch London? The story starts in 2014, when the owner of sketch - Mourad Mazouz - invited Mahdavi to discuss the plan of the space, calling it a 'small project'. In the end, it grew into something a lot bigger than expected. The project met many obstacles along the way; limited amount of time, budget, and the whole process of finding a meaningful and authentic idea, which was a real challenge. It was finding the right tone of pink that was definitely the Eureka moment of the project for India.

When asked how The Gallery bloomed at its pinkest, she says: 'When I met with Mourad Mazouz that first day at the gallery, I remember a few things: the previous installation by artist Martin Creed, which was "one of everything"—not

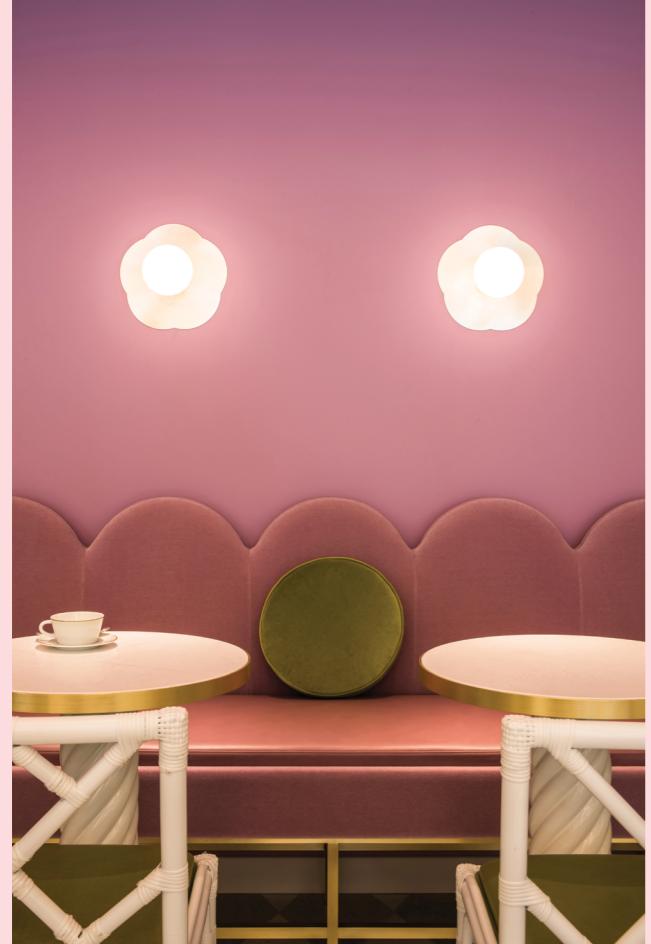
one object was repeated twice—every chair, every table, every lamp, fork, glass, etc. was different. It gave the room a very eclectic-stifling feel. Then I remember David Shrigley's provocative drawings - and instinctively, I thought about using pink, as it represented such an interesting contrast of what was there. Monochrome pink came to my mind - it was a two-minute sparkle based on 20 years of experience. In hindsight, the monochromatic use of colour, the use of pink on a large scale, and the immersive space it has become, are the defining aspects of its success.'

While we discuss colours, Mahdavi says that people are afraid of them. Choosing the right one is a difficult task. You can compare it to a wardrobe; it's always easier to dress in all black, than combining five different colours and looking good. I ask about her challenges when working with colour, and India explains she doesn't discriminate against any of them, but she does find blue as a particularly difficult one to work with. And when I ask her about a project that she found difficult to finish, India admits it is her own house. "For the first time, I am confronted with renovating my own house in Arles."

However much I enjoy exploring India's colourful mind, I must let her get back to what she does best - bringing more unique ideas to life. Before letting her go, I just need to find out one last thing: how she experiences pink.

She leaves me with: "Pink tastes sweet, it feels warm, and it smells like childhood."

euphoria  
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**"In Paris, the light is pink. In London, the grass is green, and the sky is grey. In New York, the light is orange or mandarine au lait."**